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Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 091762

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES -- RESETTLEMENT IN THAILAND?

REF: BANGKOK 7435

1. DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES EMBASSY'S EXCELLENT REPORT (REFTEL) ON VIEWS OF RTG REFUGEE OFFICIALS ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY RTG'S DECISION TO RECOGNIZE FORMALLY THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AS LONG TERM AND TO ES-
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TABLISH AN OFFICE OF REFUGEE AFFAIRS WITHIN MOI. WE UNDER-STAND AND APPRECIATE THE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES WHICH THE RTG HAS IN GRAPPLING WITH THESE PROBLEMS PUBLICLY AND REA-LIZE THAT PROGRESS ON THIS PROBLEM MAY BE GRUDGING AND SLOWER THAN DESIREABLE.
, - -
2. NEVERTHELESS, IT SEEMS TO US, THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT

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OF THIS OFFICE IS THE LOGICAL CULMINATION OF THE EVOLUTION
OF RTG THINKING ON THIS SUBJECT OVER THE PAST YEAR. WE
WONDER, THEREFORE, IF NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR THE USG,
UNHCR, AND OTHER THIRD COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS INTERESTED
IN THIS PROBLEM TO APPROACH THE THAI ON A DIFFERENT BASIS.
WE BELIEVE THE TIME MAY HAVE COME TO BEGIN TO DISCUSS IN
PRACTICAL RATHER THAN THEORETICAL TERMS THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR AT LEAST SEMI-PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT OF THE BULK OF
THESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND

3. NOT ONLY DOES A PERCEPTION OF SHIFTING THAI ATTITUDES
LEAD US TO THIS CONCLUSION BUT, INDEED, FACTORS EXTERNAL
TO THAILAND FORCE US TO CONSIDER SUCH AN APPROACH. WE
NOTE THAT THIRD COUNTRY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNHCR PRO-
GRAM FOR INDOCHINESE IN THAILAND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MEAGER.
UNHCR REP/NY DAYAL TELLS US HE BELIEVES RESISTANCE TO
SUCH CONTRIBUTIONS IS GROWING AS NO PROGRESS TOWARDS RE-
SETTLEMENT IS SEEN. IN RECENT BUDGET HEARINGS BEFORE THE
CONGRESS ON THE US CONTRIBUTION TO THIS PROGRAM, KEY
CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS REPEATEDLY VOICED CONCERN
AT THE MINIMAL NATURE OF THIRD COUNTRY CONTRIBUTIONS AND
CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD BE UNWILLING TO
CONTINUE NEAR EXCLUSIVE US FUNDING FOR THIS PROGRAM
MUCH LONGER. THEY WERE ALSO MARKEDLY TROUBLED THAT SO
LITTLE PROGRESS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MADE TOWARDS A PER-
MANENT RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM AND THAT NO REAL PRE-
DICTION COULD BE MADE AS TO WHEN THE PROBLEM MIGHT BE
RESOLVED. THUS, CONCERN WAS EXPRESSED THAT THE US MIGHT
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BE SLIDING INTO SEMI-PERMANENT MAINTENANCE OF REFUGEE
CAMPS.

4. WHILE OTHER NATIONS HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO CONTRI-
BUTE TO UNHCR CARE AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS FOR INDO-
CHINESE REFUGEES, DEPARTMENT BELIEVES THAT THERE CON-
TINUES TO BE CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY IN THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY FOR THE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS WHICH THAILAND FACES
IN ABSORBING THESE REFUGEES. THUS, WE BELIEVE IT MIGHT
BE POSSIBLE TO ELICIT SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT FOR PLANNING
FOR A MORE PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFU-
GEES INSIDE THAILAND. WHILE THE RTG MAY, FOR POLITICAL
REASONS, WISH TO MAINTAIN THE JURIDICAL STATUS OF THESE
REFUGEES UNCHANGED, THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF SUCH A PRO-
GRAM WOULD BE TO PLACE THESE REFUGEES ON A FOOTING OF REAL
SELF-SUFFICIENCY WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THEIR DE FACTO IN-
TEGRATION INTO THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

5. WE NOTE WITH CONSIDERABLE ENCOURAGEMENT THE COMMENT

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BY DAMRONG TO THE EFFECT THAT RTG WAS LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE KHMER AND LAO REFUGEES, SINCE THIS IS THE BULK OF THE RESETTLEMENT PROBLEM FACED BY THE RTG IN TERMS OF NEW INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. WE BELIEVE THAT THE COMBINATION OF USG AND THIRD COUNTRY EFFORTS IN THE BOAT CASE PROGRAM WILL BE EFFECTIVE IN MAINTAINING THE NUMBER OF NEW VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND AT AN ACCEPTABLE MINIMUM.

6. FOR BANGKOK: REQUEST EMBASSY COMMENT ON ABOVE. WE BELIEVE EMBASSY SHOULD COORDINATE AN APPROACH WITH THE UNHCR TO URGE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE RTG AND TO OFFER TO WORK WITH THE RTG IN PLANNING FOR THE SEMI-PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT OF THE BULK OF THE LAO AND KHMER POPULATIONS IN THAILAND. IF THE RTG IS RECEPTIVE TO BEGINNING TO PLAN FOR SUCH A PROCESS, DEPARTMENT WILL ALSO SEEK PARTICIPATION OF OTHER NATIONS INTERESTED IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM, PARTICULARLY THE JAPANESE, AUSTRALIAN, AND WESTERN EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS. WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH AN EFFORT SHOULD ALSO INVOLVE A NUMBER OF UN ORGANIZATIONS AND THAT OVERALL EFFORT SHOULD PROBABLY BE UNDER THE COORDINATION OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES. SUCH A PROJECT OBVIOUSLY WOULD INVOLVE SUBSTANTIAL COSTS. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WOULD BE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT SUCH AN APPROACH TO THIS PROBLEM. WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL AS TO CONSIDER AN APPROPRIATE USG CONTRIBUTION THERETO.

7. THE SOURCE OF USG FUNDS FOR SUCH A PROGRAM WOULD BE SUBJECT TO CONSIDERATIONS OF WHICH EXPEDITURES ARE MORE CLEARLY FOR THE REGULAR CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF REFUGEES AND WHICH EXPENDITURES INVOLVE PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT. THE LATTER CAN PROBABLY BE REGARDED AS DEVELOPMENT AND PROPERLY SUPPORTED BY AID FUNDING. HOWEVER, IN PRACTICAL TERMS, WHETHER, FUNDING IS PROVIDED FROM AID APPROPRIATIONS OR REFUGEE FUNDS, USOM BANGKOK MUST BE VERY MUCH INVOLVED IN PLANNING WITH THE RTG, THE UNHCR, AND ANY OTHER PARTICIPATING GOVERNMENTS.

8. FOR GENEVA: MISSION SHOULD DISCUSS THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS WITH THE UNHCR TO OBTAIN THEIR VIEWS ON HOW BEST TO PROCEED IN THIS MATTER.
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Message Attributes

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